

House Majority Leader [Steny Hoyer](#) appears to be solidifying his position as the Democratic leader whom Republicans can deal with and trust next year.

Over the past week, the Maryland lawmaker has made several public overtures to get in the good graces of Speaker-designate [John Boehner](#) : He mingled with GOP staff and allies at the Ohio Republican's annual holiday bash, outlined a bipartisan governing agenda at a press event Monday and went out of his way Tuesday to praise how the GOP's leadership has handled its transition to the majority.

The role of chief emissary to Republicans is one that he has long held in the Democratic Caucus — although in his last stint in the minority, Hoyer worked most closely with his good friend and longtime GOP Whip [Roy Blunt](#) (Mo.), who is heading to the Senate. Hoyer does not have nearly as close a relationship with Boehner, Majority Leader-designate

[Eric Cantor](#)

(R-Va.) or Majority Whip-designate

[Kevin McCarthy](#)

(R-Calif.).

Not that he isn't trying.

At his pen-and-pad press conference Tuesday, Hoyer said the transition to Republican rule has been much more respectful this time around. Republicans picked up 63 Democratic seats Nov. 2 to regain the majority and forced demotions for Hoyer and the rest of the Democratic leadership. Hoyer becomes Minority Whip in January.

"The atmosphere has been markedly better," Hoyer said, noting that the 1994 Republican takeover was marked by confrontation and a lack of consideration.

"I want to congratulate Mr. Boehner and the Republican leadership," Hoyer said, adding that he has also had productive meetings with McCarthy, who will be taking Hoyer's office space in the new Congress. "The attitude, I think, is an attitude which will provide, I think, for a positive undertaking of our respective responsibilities next year."

In a Monday press conference at the National Press Club, Hoyer outlined several areas where there could be bipartisan agreements next year, including deficit reduction and tax reform.

“I think the American people want us both to work together to solve problems that they know are real problems, not ideological left and right problems, but problems that they see in the terms of their jobs, in the debt that confronts their country,” he said.

The veteran Member — long a deficit hawk — said such efforts must be bipartisan, pointing to President Ronald Reagan’s deals with then-Speaker Tip O’Neill (D-Mass.) and Ways and Means Chairman Dan Rostenkowski (D-Ill.) on Social Security and tax reform in the 1980s; he said similar bipartisan accomplishments are possible next year.

“I think we can do that because the demands to do so are compelling and immediate,” Hoyer said.

He’s pushing in particular for a tax reform package that would simplify the tax code, reduce rates and shrink deductions. “And I’m hopeful that members of both parties will come together to do that,” Hoyer said. “I certainly intend to work with Mr. Boehner and Mr. Cantor and Mr. McCarthy, all of whom I’ve talked to about this effort.”

Boehner said he has a good relationship with Hoyer.

“We’ve worked on a lot of things over the years,” Boehner said Tuesday. But the Ohio Republican declined to offer specifics.

“He wouldn’t want you to know, I wouldn’t want you to know, we wouldn’t want anyone else to know,” Boehner said jokingly of the work they had done together.

Sources described Boehner and Hoyer's relationship as cordial and respectful, but they said the two are not personal friends. And while it is likely that House Republicans will communicate regularly with Hoyer on the schedule and institutional matters, Democrats don't expect the new majority to do much negotiating with him — or any other Democrat — on legislation.

"Hoyer and Boehner don't have much history of working closely on specific things," one Hoyer ally said. "They will be communicating on procedural and institutional matters, schedule-type issues — things the American people will never see and likely not care about."

Hoyer and Cantor's relationship appears to have improved in recent months. The two lawmakers had been known to spar on the House floor during the weekly colloquies on the schedule; the exchanges often turned testy when the otherwise banal discussion of the agenda turned partisan.

"Leader Hoyer is well-respected within the Republican Conference as an effective leader and a tough but fair adversary, and though he and Eric have legitimate policy disagreements, they share a mutual respect and a solid working relationship," Cantor spokesman Brad Dayspring said. "Eric enjoyed the good-natured spirit of the colloquy and looks forward to continuing the relationship in the 112th Congress."

Many Republicans had privately said they would have preferred Hoyer as the top Democrat in the 112th Congress over outgoing Speaker [Nancy Pelosi](#), believing he is a more pragmatic player than the California Democrat. But Pelosi chose to stand as Minority Leader next year, leaving Hoyer with the No. 2 position.

A Democratic lobbyist said it won't take long for Hoyer to ingratiate himself with Republicans, regardless of his position.

"He's perfectly capable of building it," this Democratic lobbyist said. "That's who they want, that's who they trust. They trust him because he's a straight shooter."

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